UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/AC.47/1999/4/Add.3
8 February 1999

ENGLISH
Original: ENGLISH/FRENCH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-fifth session
Open-ended inter-sessional ad hoc working group
on a permanent forum for indigenous people
Geneva, 15-19 February 1999
Item 4 of the provisional agenda

PROPOSALS FOR THE POSSIBLE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PERMANENT FORUM FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Information from Governments

In its resolution 1998/20, the Commission on Human Rights decided to establish an open-ended inter-sessional ad hoc working group to elaborate and consider further proposals for the possible establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people within the United Nations system. The Commission requested the ad hoc working group to take into account in its work the comments received from Governments, indigenous and non-governmental organizations. The present document contains information received from a Government. Any further information from Governments, indigenous or non-governmental organizations will be made available in the addenda to the present document.

GE.99-10875 (E)

SWITZERLAND

[11 January 1999]
[Original: French]

1. Switzerland is in favour of the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people within the United Nations system.

2. Indeed, the appropriate consideration of all matters relating to indigenous peoples requires the creation of a suitable forum for discussion, as provided for in the Declaration of the World Conference on Human Rights held at Vienna. That is why Switzerland has, since 1993, supported the idea of a permanent body that would serve as a forum for the representatives of indigenous peoples, the non-governmental organizations concerned and States.

3. This permanent body would enable the various representatives mentioned above to discuss together questions of concern to them in this area. These questions could thus be addressed globally, taking into account existing interrelationships between the problems faced by the indigenous peoples. The protection of the rights of indigenous peoples, the prevention of conflicts, measures to curb all forms of poverty and discrimination, the creation of conditions conducive to sustainable development and the protection of the natural environment all speak in favour of the rapid establishment of a body of this nature. This body would offer the indigenous peoples a window on the world, enabling them to assert their rights, whether civil, cultural, economic, political or social, before the international community. Indigenous representatives could thus use this forum to coordinate their actions in all areas of concern to them within the United Nations.

4. Switzerland emphasizes that it is most important that the mandates of this permanent forum, on the one hand, and of existing United Nations bodies, on the other, should be defined in as much detail as possible. Pointless duplication and, consequently, additional expenditure, would be in the interest neither of the indigenous peoples nor of the United Nations.

5. In any event, Switzerland is in favour of the rapid establishment of a body of this nature at an appropriate level under the Economic and Social Council, as for example under the Commission on Human Rights, or at the same level as the Commission. Moreover, this new body constitutes, with the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, one of the two main specific objectives of the present Decade of the World's Indigenous People.